

Connellys' Classroom Cutaway

Tips for K-12 educators for helping students communicate and create using visual motion media, photography, and technology

By John and Marilyn Connelly



Marilyn and I were privileged to have one of the best jobs in education. At least that is what we thought each day as we looked forward to opportunities to help students communicate and create using media. Our Communication Arts Learning Center had students during the school day. We had students from other high schools attending our school to participate in the Learning Center. Although housed at a high school, we offered after school workshops for 5th- to 8th graders and summertime workshops for teachers from all over the state of Hawaii. We also were invited to consult at other schools. Throughout our 35 teaching years in Hawaii we had many opportunities to see student produced media successes. Here are three examples, which are transferable to other locales, curricula and student ages.

"Getting to Know You"

We used this very generic activity at the beginning of every semester. We asked each student to stand in front of a video camera and introduce themselves to the class. We gave them six or seven items to address, such as name, including spelling and nickname, if any. We would have them tell us about their family, pets, travel,

and favorite school subject. All of the other students were to take notes (this was turned in for a grade). This activity broke the ice in a classroom of strangers, often caused some laughter, especially when we played back the tape. Later Marilyn and I would look at the tape alone, stopping occasionally to discuss what we had learned. It was very useful.

Process videos

Many types of classes have activities that are important to the curriculum. Over the years, we helped many teachers video tape such processes to show to future groups. We had an energetic Home Econ teacher that used student-produced media often. We helped her record the steps in making cookies, beginning with gathering the ingredients, following the recipe, taking the cookies from the oven and finally tasting the end product. After that she showed the tape to new students about to engage in that process.

"Do It in the Dirt"

This was the title given to a production which was one of the best examples we ever saw of a teacher getting control of a rowdy class by tapping into the students' interest. This was a Special Education class

of mostly boys. None of them were severely handicapped, but were dysfunctional learners with a track record of failing in school. Two of the boys were dirt bike riders. On the weekends they rode their bikes, often in competition. On Monday they showed up in class with red dirt still under their fingernails, to hear the teacher tell it, bubbling to tell their classmates about their riding adventures. It seemed that this topic really got the attention of whole class. After making great efforts to steer the class in the direction of the planned materials, she decided to "join 'em". She called Marilyn and me in to ask if we could help her to use the class to make an action video of the two boys and their dirt bikes. At first Marilyn was hesitant. All of these boys were very large and wild-eyed. But we took the challenge. We divided the class into production groups. We needed a director, someone to boss everyone around. It turned out to be a girl, a tough mouthed gal, in Hawaii called "A tita". Even the big guys listened to her directions. We needed a couple of writers. We needed tech crew. We already had our stars. And everyone else would be the audience.

What an experience that was. The students were charged up. Many showed their first interest in anything about school. Parents noticed. Some

called the school to find out what we were doing. The principal was hesitant to let this group off campus to race dirt bikes. He assigned a counselor and a security guy to accompany us on our one-day field trip out to the North Shore of Oahu where a dirt bike racetrack was cut through the red clay hills. Parents drove us at 5 AM in the morning. They packed food for the day. Marilyn and I brought several of our experienced media students to work as peer tutors to the Special Ed students. After the project was edited, a Premiere Party was held one evening in the Special Ed classroom. A rockin' time was had by all. Thereafter there was a significant change in the classroom behavior. The teacher believed that success was because of "Do It in the Dirt".

Bonus tip

Marilyn may be retired but she still thinks up lesson plans for fun. A couple of years ago she got an iPhone with many "apps". She said, "This would be a perfect launch point for teaching the history of media." History teachers who want to approach the last hundred years of history from a media point of view, here is a bonus tip.



The iPhone, and other amazing smart phones today are, in the palm of your hand, are a collection of media inventions, which have changed our history, culture and our very behavior. There are at least fifteen separate icons, representing these inventions. If you had a class of 30, divide them into teams of two. Each team will be assigned to research one of these inventions and produce a power point research presentation on their findings. Here are 15 possibilities:

1. The telephone
2. Still photography
3. Videography
4. Television/Utube
5. Cinematography
6. Music –recording and listening
7. Personal computers
8. Radio
9. email/Facebook
10. Typewriter
11. Clocks/alarm/stopwatch/Zulu/TimeZones
12. GPS
13. Calendars—ancient/evolution/modern
14. Calculators – ancient/evolution/modern
15. Search engines, such as Google, Yahoo/Library Card Catalog



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